

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 000648

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/01/2015

TAGS: [ETRD](#) [IZ](#) [MARR](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [TU](#)

SUBJECT: THE TURKEY-IRAQ BORDERS CROSSING WORKS DESPITE APPARENT CHAOS

Classified By: DCM Robert Deutsch for reasons 1.4 b & d.

11. (C) Summary and Introduction: At the Turkey-Iraq border crossing, officials and facilities are strained but still functioning. The lines on the Turkish side waiting to enter Iraq are relatively short and orderly, in contrast to the apparent chaos across the Iraqi border where hundreds of trucks wait in makeshift lots along the highway for southbound escorts, while 10,000 more wait in a series of muddy lots or a long line stretching over the Zakho pass. The cause of the backlog in Iraq is a manual security inspection conducted by the Turkish Jandarma. In the midst of this, Iraqi customs officials, truck company expeditors and KBR employees try to bring some order to the process while a thousand Peshmerga patrol the area to keep the simmering frustrations from exploding. Customs officials are doing as much as can be expected to process the never-ending lines of trucks and respond to special requests from the U.S. Despite the frustration of the long waits, needed supplies continue flowing, largely because of the coordination among Turkish, Iraqi and U.S. officials at the border. End Summary and Introduction.

12. (SBU) On January 12-13, Mission Turkey personnel visited the Turkish-Iraqi border crossing at Habur Gate/Ibrahim Khalil, the single border crossing between Turkey and Iraq and an important route for coalition supplies and SOMO-purchased fuels. AMCON Adana PO, Ankara econoff and EXBS adviser, Marine Attache, along with Zakho MCT personnel and accompanied by EUCOM LNO to TU SF and TFF, visited the Turkish Habur gate border crossing, attending the weekly meeting of Turkish, Iraqi and U.S. officials at the border. There we pressed for better communication between GoT and IIG border officials and a sustained effort to reduce the northbound backlog of about 10,000 trucks. GoT officials expressed a desire to cooperate on pushing southbound sustainment loads as expeditiously as possible, but regretted that heavy security screening causing the northbound backlog was a direct result of the need to "protect Turkish citizens from the security threats in northern Iraq and elsewhere in Iraq from spilling into the Turkish Republic." Both GoT and IIG officials noted that a dialogue on a second border crossing was underway without elaborating on that discussion, progress or timetable. The northern Iraq SOMO representative stressed that fuel imported from Turkey was being transported regularly as far south as Baghdad and was not "only for local consumption," a statement noted by the Turkish MFA representative who chairs the weekly meeting. Turkish driver representatives also complained that coalition sustainment cargo was being prioritized for transit at their expense and that this was increasing the already significant hardship that they faced in the over a week to ten day-long waiting line to return to Turkey.

13. (SBU) In parallel meetings in Iraq with the Ibrahim Khalil Customs Director, we pressed for better communication on the timing of cross-border pushes to alleviate the clogging of the one-lane transit bridges north- and southbound. We also pressed for demonstrably better Iraqi security pre-screening to mitigate some of the GoT concerns about the nature of potential returning trucker cargoes. The Ibrahim Khalil Director acknowledged the need to work on security pre-screening and said a U.S. contractor in March or early April would deliver prototype x-ray and other unidentified non-invasive security screening technology to that end. He predicted that this technology would address some GoT concerns, once it was brought on-line.

14. (SBU) In subsequent tours of transshipment and muddy holding yards for the thousands of backlogged vehicles in Iraq, we saw the equivalent of 50-60 miles of trucks snaking through mud lots and four-wide lines awaiting a window to try to re-enter Turkey. The Iraqi side is a sprawling and milling ant farm of tanker trucks, freight vehicles, make-shift food vendors, idled truck drivers playing backgammon or drinking tea, cargo office huts and rutted roads on which a handful of U.S. MCT personnel, a KBR contractor and a couple dozen Iraqi customs administrators try to run herd. According to the Ibrahim Khalil Customs Director, approximately 1,000 Peshmerga provide perimeter security for the border crossing, utilizing the natural bowl geography as a proxy line of defense. Miraculously -- and mysteriously -- it functions to the extent that cargoes keep flowing. However, the northbound flow has been severely restricted by Turkish security checks.

15. (C) Embassy Ankara EXBS adviser extensively surveyed the southbound (into Iraq) GoT Customs process, finding it lacking administrative support and funding, but functioning much like most busy international border crossings. He was not permitted to approach the Jandarma unit screening trucks entering Turkey from Iraq. Customs officials reported that the planned modernization of the customs facilities would commence in March and would improve truck processing. (Note: for the last two years this project has been a month or two from beginning.) However, the 10-18 month project might have a negative impact on border throughput, they added, although they could offer little insight into how that aspect of the project might be addressed, reflecting that was an "Ankara issue."

16. (SBU) In a January 13 meeting with Savas Unlu, Turkish sub-governor in charge of the crossing, the Mission Turkey team and MCT representatives heard positive comments on the improving cross-border information flow on the status of incident reports involving Turkish citizens, a GoT appreciation that recent IIG policies on exporting fuel were meeting some GoT fuel smuggling concerns and an assertion that the extensive inbound/northbound security was still necessary given the "PKK and insurgent threat across the border." Unlu also stressed that Turkey had lost "almost a hundred citizen drivers since the start of the conflict, making Turkey, although not a troop provider, the third largest casualty-suffering country in Iraq."

17. (SBU) Unlu also underlined that, although the GoT sincerely appreciates the Coalition effort to provide more information on incidents involving Turkish citizens in Iraq and wishes that information flow to broaden, it has seen its citizens "dismayed by the poor manner in which those remains sometimes return."

18. (C) Comment: Turkish and Iraqi officials on either side of the border do a surprisingly good job in miserable conditions and in a tense situation. The Turkey-Iraq border has been operating 24 hours a day, full-tilt for over a year. In that time, Turkey's concerns about PKK infiltration from Iraq have increased, the condition of roads and bridges has deteriorated and more than 70 Turkish drivers have lost their lives in Iraq. Nevertheless, our supplies are accorded priority treatment at the borders and the supply line continues to function. When special requests are made, both sides have shown a willingness to help. It has been our experience that for most problems, unforeseen events or special requests that affect the border, the coordination done on the ground by Turkish, Iraqi and MJLC is effective. The movement of trucks southbound -- from Turkey into Iraq -- runs well. Turkish and Iraqi Customs officials have managed to process about 1500 trucks per day, and when there has been a backlog (the last time due to the December truckers strike), they have managed to quickly reduce the backlog. The process northbound is another issue. Truckers wait long periods in miserable conditions to cross the border into Turkey. Organizing the trucks into holding lots and lines is a monumental task. Customs officials on both sides are doing their best to organize and process the trucks, but the backlog persists because of the manual searches conducted by the Turkish Jandarma.

19. (C) Day-to-day cooperation between Iraqi and Turkish customs authorities works reasonably well. The involvement of the MCT at the weekly border meetings gives us important insights into emerging problems and some influence on decisions. Turkish authorities have complained about security for their drivers in Iraq but they have done little to reduce the backlog that is a serious frustration and economic cost for the drivers, as well as a security risk in itself. Embassy has raised concerns about the border backlogs repeatedly and at all levels with the GOT. We have seen some improvements, but the government does not seem willing to address the biggest bottleneck -- the Jandarma inspection at the border. End Comment.

110. (U) Baghdad Minimize Considered.
EDELMAN